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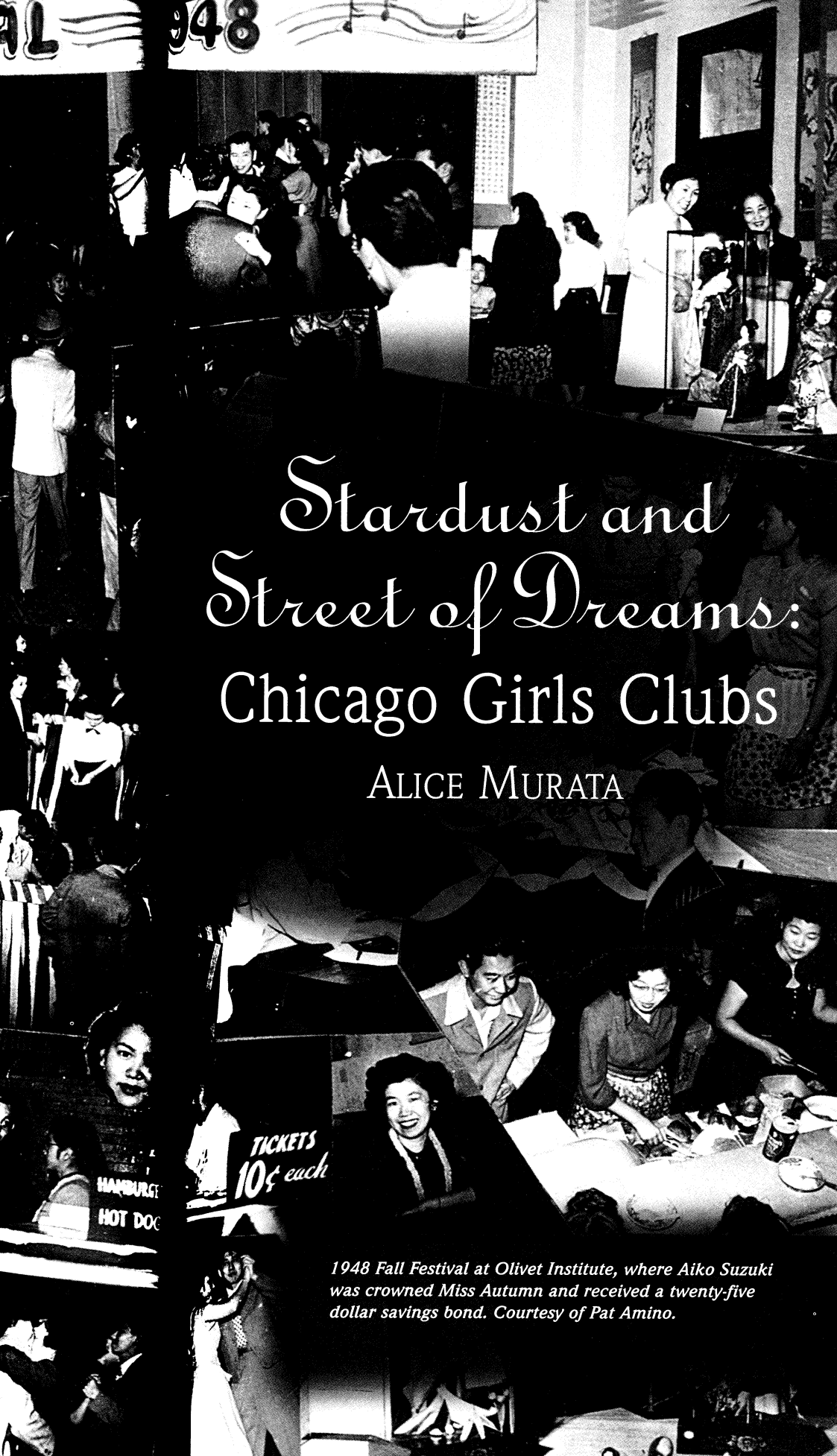


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Stardust and Street of Dreams: Chicago Girls Clubs

ALICE MURATA

1948 Fall Festival at Olivet Institute, where Aiko Suzuki was crowned Miss Autumn and received a twenty-five dollar savings bond. Courtesy of Pat Amino.

Editor's Note

In December 1941, about 350 Japanese Americans lived in Chicago. By 1944, that number had risen to fifty-one hundred; eventually, more than twenty thousand Americans of Japanese ancestry settled in Chicago. The reason: the forced relocation of Japanese Americans from their West Coast homes to internment camps and then to inland areas. Against the backdrop of America's war against Japan, these new Chicagoans struggled to rebuild their lives and establish a sense of community in their new homes.

More than 85 percent of the migrants were young. In their new homes, they looked for new ways to socialize with their peers. A primary way of doing this was forming girls clubs, which Alice Murata discusses in this article.

This article is an outgrowth of *REgenerations: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era*, a collaborative Civil Liberties Public Education Fund grant project between the Japanese American National Museum and the Chicago Japanese American Historical Society to explore and document the impact of the incarceration of 120,000 Japanese Americans by the U.S. government during World War II. Ten individuals' memories were documented in video oral history interviews in each of four Nikkei communities: Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Jose. Pat Amino (formerly Aiko Suzuki)'s memories of her experiences in one of the girls clubs are the basis for this article. Amino was interviewed on March 30, 1998, by Dr. Mary Doi as part of this project.

Alice Murata is a professor in the Department of Counselor Education, Northeastern Illinois University, and director of the Oral History project for the Chicago Japanese American Historical Society.

Origins of Girls Clubs

The architect for the girls clubs was Abe Hagiwara, a trained social worker who came from a Cleveland YMCA, where he had gained experience working with troubled youth. Hagiwara thought that Japanese Americans' prewar living conditions in centralized Little Tokyos had allowed for them to easily be herded into concentration camps. After such a stressful experience, Hagiwara realized, Japanese Americans needed support as they assimilated into mainstream America. Hagiwara argued that organization into small cohort groups would facilitate Japanese Americans' adjustment to a new city.

By 1948, Hagiwara helped to create more than one hundred such clubs, eighteen of them girls clubs, which he organized into the Girls Inter-Club Council. Girls clubs were decentralized, self-originating groups organized by the Nisei (second-generation Japanese American) girls. The council's charter indicated that they wanted to serve as a clearinghouse for social activities, sponsor community activities, and create educational programs. Through this group, ideas for social and service projects were exchanged, leadership training was given, and joint activities were sponsored, such as teas, bazaars, and lectures. Newsletters disseminated information about club activities. Each club, which had about fifteen same-age members elected their own officers, charged dues, and held regular meetings.

The first group to form was the Jolenes, which is French for "born beautiful," in January 1947 at Hyde Park High School; other groups at that school included the Debonnaires and the Colleens (first known as the Tyrolenes). YuKyes, which means "friends" in Japanese, were made up of Hyde Park graduates. The Philos were based at Wells High School, while girls at Waller High School formed the Silhouettes and Charmettes. Other clubs were church based, such as the Maya Devi from the Midwest Buddhist Church. The Ting-a-Lings were initially the Chi Sigs, but changed their name to that of their sponsor, a chocolate shop, and then later became the Bambis. The Meta Aldelphons formed with interest in promoting good race relations. Other clubs included the Estelles, Chaletines, Cidys, Dawnelles, Gremlins, Mam'selles, Serenes, Sorrelles, and Velvett.

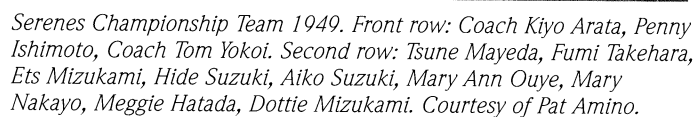


1947 Olivet Institute Dance. First row: Sachi Sugimoto Yasunaga, Thelma Tanaka Uchida, Rulie Kaneko Yamamoto, Margaret Morita Hiratsuka, Jeanne Kasuguma Kawako, Fukuye Sakamoto, Paula Haga Kitahata, Emi Hamaka. Second row: Grace Oishi Kishaba, Norrie Yamagiwa Andow, Margaret Makino Miyamoto, Coach Thomas Mayahara, Coach Harry Sakamoto, Sue Okubo Oshita, and Aiko Haga Tsuru. Courtesy of Margaret Hiratsuka.



The Ting-a-Lings named their club after a local soda shop on Division Street near Clark. CHS photograph.

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At Amino's experience with relocation camps, resettlement in Chicago, and with the Silhouettes was typical of many other Japanese American girls. Amino was born and raised in Boyle Heights in Los Angeles. Her father died when she was two years old, so her mother worked to support the family. Shortly after the December 7, 1941, bombing of Pearl Harbor, two FBI men came to pick up her mother, a Japanese school-teacher. The family had a picture of Jesus on the wall. Amino's mother told the agents that "Jesus is my Lord and Savior," and they decided, "'We can't take her, she's Christian.' They had pity on us." The family was kept intact and evacuated to Poston, one of ten concentration camps that housed Japanese Americans forcibly removed from the West Coast during World War II.

Silhouettes ledger. Courtesy of Pat Amino.

Coming to Chicago

While interned, Amino's two older sisters left camp temporarily to do seasonal work, such as canning tomatoes for months at a time in Utah. Later, Amino's sisters left permanently for Chicago, a leading industrial center whose economy was booming due to the war. Amino's sisters joined blacks from the south and rural farm workers in responding to Chicago's urgent pleas for workers. In August 1945, Amino, then a fourteen-year-old, traveled alone by train to join her sisters in Chicago. Her sisters had jobs and housing. Shortly thereafter, Amino's mother and her younger sister joined them in Chicago, so their entire family was reunited.

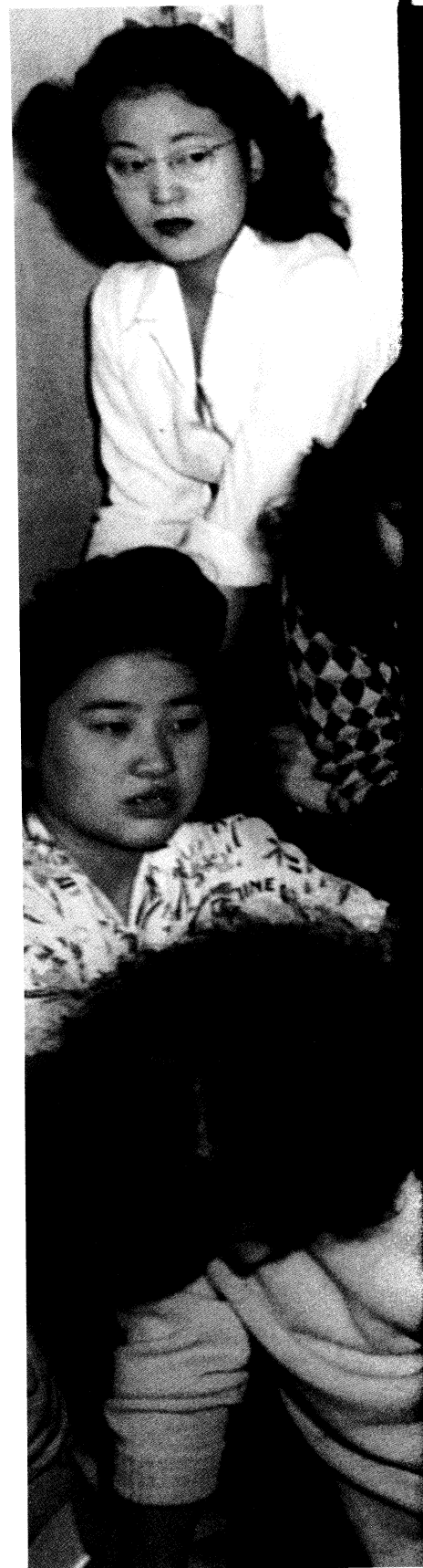
Chicago's Nisei

Nisei girls arrived in Chicago ready to adopt new lifestyles. In 1945, half of the evacuees were younger than twenty-four years old. Seventy percent of the females were younger than twenty-five years old, and only one-third of them were married. Available housing was in the marginal areas of overcrowded slums filled with crime and delinquency. The War Relocation Authority (WRA) designated buffer zones in which Japanese Americans were forced to reside.

Crowded Housing

Amino resided in an attic apartment of a three-flat building split into twelve units. Overcrowding was typical; building codes permitted housing to be subdivided because of the shortage of accommodations. The five members of Amino's family shared one bedroom while one slept on the living room couch. The bathroom was shared with other families.

Jolene's meeting: Yeko Yamamoto Shishida, Minnie Himamoto, Lily Ito, Betty Kawanaga Fukuda, Teri Nakaguchi, Noreen Nishiyama Enkoji, Terri Yamashita, Lil Nitahava. Photographer Ken Mazawa.







The Generation Gap

Most Nisei teenagers did not like to remain at home in cramped spaces. Their Issei (first-generation Japanese Americans) parents did not want their adolescent daughters to hang out in neighborhood bars, strip joints, or gambling houses with *yogores*, or zoot suiters, who sported flashy clothes and non-conformist conduct. Many Issei worried that their daughters would become prostitutes, get pregnant, or live with men without being married. They wanted their daughters to remain “good” at a time of rapidly changing sexual mores. Japanese American parents thus preferred the organized activities of girls clubs to the many surrounding negative influences of city neighborhoods. They maintained high aspirations for their offspring.

Silhouettes at the Street of Dreams Dance, Lincoln Hall, on September 3, 1947. Courtesy of Pat Amino. Clockwise from furthest left: Ets Mizukami, Aiko Suzuki, Yo Ishimoto, Takayo Tsubouchi, Emma Kushino, Rose Morihiro, Dorothy Kanii, Marion Shiota, Helen Kitahata, Betty Kushino, Alice Matsuno, Lucy Uyeda, Toby Ozone.



A Close-knit Circle

The Silhouettes was a tightly knit circle of Nisei girls. They were emotionally close with shared pasts of prewar living in West Coast communities, degrading camp experiences, and discrimination. They had similar values and beliefs as well as shared future concerns of education, jobs, and finding marriage partners. Club members saw each other often and offered timely support and help in confronting confusing challenges of integration.

The Silhouettes never terminated anyone from their club. They identified with and took care of each other. They demonstrated cohesion and group loyalty by wearing club jackets, matching plaid blouses, and club patches. They had nicknames for each other and often talked about guys. They had classes together and held meetings at each other's houses, so they knew each other's parents and families. They had fun going out every weekend on sleigh rides, hayrides, to talent shows, bowling alleys, and Blackhawks games. They also took occasional trips to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

Opposite: Ting-a-Lings 1949 basketball team sporting team jackets as they head for the playoffs. First row: Grace Oishi Kishaba, Sue Okubo Oshita, Mary Akiyama Tokuhisa. Second row: Norrie Yamagiwa Andow, June Kushino Ogino, Aiko Haga Tsuru, Margaret Makino Miyamoto, Thelma Tanaka Uchida. Courtesy of Margaret Hiratsuka.

Love and Marriage

Isseis hoped that their Nisei daughters would enter into a good marriage and raise children. Both generations knew that the days of the picture bride and prewar use of *baishakunins*, or matchmakers, to arrange marriages were over. The Issei women's belief that compatibility developed during a marriage as women fulfilled their obligations and responsibilities to their husbands differed from their daughters' romantic ideals of marrying for love. Chicago Nisei women did not want to follow in their mothers' footsteps and perpetuate service to their husbands and then sons. Instead, many of Chicago's Nisei chose to adopt



American ways of selecting a man to love and marry as outlined in popular magazines like *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*. Girls clubs provided a distinctive new way to court, allowing Nisei girls to have fun and meet boys at the same time.

Evelyn Hidaka, Betty Kawanaga Fukuda, Yeko Yamamoto Shishida, and Teri Nakaguchi in front of Hyde Park High School. Photographer Ken Mazawa.

Issei expected their daughters to conform to a standard norm of proper behavior. Nisei girls remained sensitive to their parents' wishes, but were free to develop independently in a manner of their own choosing. Amino's mother encouraged her to behave in ways that would not bring shame to their family. She was comfortable when Amino was with her "good" Nisei club sisters, safe at supervised events with many young Nisei youth.

After Amino came of age, her mother encouraged her to go out with Japanese boys. When she dated Caucasian boys in high school, Amino recalls, her mother "almost had a fit," telling Amino, "'No, no, no good.' That's why all of us married Japanese," Amino recalls. She eventually stopped dating Caucasian boys, thinking they were not as good as Japanese boys.





Sorelles Hayride. First row: George Kittaka, Yuri Suzuki Nishioka, Unknown, Teri Wakumoto Kuzuhara, Harold Kim. Second row: Unknown, Esther Hiyama Kittaka, Betty Yoshida, Amy Tani, Yuri Kinishi, Fran Watanabe Wada, Asako Narahara Watanabe, Florette Kayumi Kim. Third row: Unknown, Unknown, surname Ogawa, Ikuro Kinishi, Dan Kuzuhara, Unknown, Unknown. Photographer Ken Mazawa.

Stardust and Street of Dreams

One of the main purposes of the Silhouettes was social, a way to meet people. “We’d have dances. We’d go to North Avenue beach and have weenie bakes,” Amino recalls. “We’d have such a good time, playing our form of volleyball. We’d stay out there all night, but nobody said anything or thought anything of it because we were so innocent.” Girls club members enjoyed activities such as swimming and card games during these parties. The music of Frank Sinatra, Vic Damone, and other popular singers blared from the radio as they danced.

The Silhouettes sponsored dances with romantic names such as “Stardust” and “Street of Dreams.” They rented the gym at Olivet Institute for twenty-five dollars, put up festive decorations with balloons, and hired a band to play Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey tunes. Beverages were sold and some dancegoers snuck liquor into the dance. Dance organizers charged a nominal admission fee with hopes of raising funds. At dances, beauty contests frequently were held to encourage Nisei men to attend, although even when they did appear, Amino recalls that a “few Nisei men were good dancers, but many stood around.” She “did not know what



Wesak Dance. Photographer Ken Mazawa.

the boys were doing there. They did not dance.” Some dances were designated “Girl’s Choice,” where turnabout permitted girls to ask boys to dance. Some shy boys had dances and dates arranged for them.

One year, the Jolenees declared an annual TWIRP (The Woman Is Required to Pay) season, which allowed girls to ask boys out. At midnight during a TWIRP dance, boys resumed asking girls to dance. Kaz Kita admonished shy boys in a *Chicago Shimpō* “Teen Stuff” column: “Two steps is better than no step.” Japanese American girls considered the ideal mate tall, personable, considerate, and lots of fun. The girls expected boys to know how to dress and not to wear a sports, bright, or plaid shirt with a suit or to come to the dance without wearing a tie.

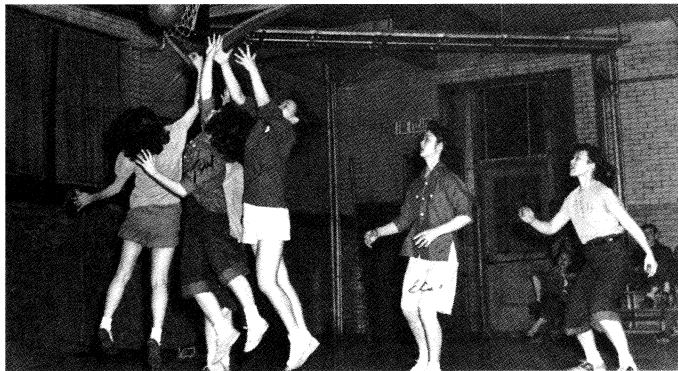


Preening for the “Miss Portrait of Spring” contest, co-sponsored by girls clubs and the Inter-Club Council, in the fabulous Tropical Room of the Sheraton Hotel. Tsune Taniguchi, June Tãmanaha, Jane Kobukata, Terry Yamanaka (winner), and Claudine Coleman. Photographer Ken Mazawa.

Playing for Fun



Silhouettes 1949. First row: Dorothy Kani, Toby Ozone, Marion Shiota. Second row: Eiko Yamaoka, Betty Kushino, Lucy Uyeda, Emma Kushino, Aiko Suzuki, Yo Ishimoto, Takayo Tsubouchi. Third row: Rosie Morihiro, Alice Matsuno, Ets Mizukami. Courtesy of Pat Amino.



Serenes vs. Ting-a-Lings Playoff Game. Grace Oishi Kishaba, Tsune Mayeda, Aiko Suzuki, Ets Mizukami, and Norrie Andow. Courtesy of Pat Amino.



Ting-a-Lings. First row: Margaret Makino Miyamoto, Unknown, Margaret Morita Hiratsuka, Sachi Sugimoto Yasunaga, Grace Oishi, Aiko Haga Tsuru. Second row: Tom Mayahara, Massie Kaseguma Kawako, Norrie Yamagiwa, Sue Okubo, Thelma Tanaka Uchida, Rulie Kaneko Yamamoto. Courtesy of Margaret Hiratsuka.



Ting-a-Lings 1947. First row: Margaret Makino Miyamoto, Margaret Morita Hiratsuka, Thelma Tanaka Uchida, Grace Oishi, Massie Kaseguma Kawano. Second row: Harry Sakamoto, Sue Okubo Oshita, June Kushino, Norrie Andow, Aiko Haga Tsuru, Unknown, Mary Akiyama Tokuhisa, Tom Mayahara. Courtesy of Margaret Hiratsuka.

The girls clubs also organized sports teams through the Chicago Nisei Athletic Association (CNAA), formed in 1946 to offer baseball, softball, basketball, bowling, golf, and swimming programs. The Silhouettes played basketball and later softball at Olivet, a northside community center. The CNAA did not outwardly encourage competition, yet many girls played to win. Sporting events provided a place for Nisei to socialize, and Amino's mother and the other Issei parents did not attend sports games. Pat Amino's team played primarily to have a good time. She was recruited to play basketball for another club, the tall Serenes, so that they could win tournaments against out-of-town teams. The Serenes emerged as champions for the second time in the Minnesota Invitational in 1949 and went to Denver to play exhibition games. On days that the Serenes did not play, they checked out the guys on the boys teams, which sported names such as Collegians, Comets, Dandies, Penguins, and Saints.



Jolene's Care Dance, November 27, 1948 at North Avenue Y, 1508 Larabee Street. Kaz Kita, president of the Jolene's, presents check for \$290 to Jane Donager, director of the Chicago Care Office. Members of all the girls clubs—including the Charmettes, Chalelaines, Debonnaires, Estelles, Mam'selles, Philos, Serenes, Silhouettes, Ting-a-Lings, and YuKyes—were hostesses and received letters of gratitude from donation recipients. Left to right are Lilly Nitahara; Ryoichi Fujii, editor of the Chicago Shimpō, a Japanese American newspaper; Kaz Kita; Jane Donager; Marji Kikuchi; Eleanor Hikida; Lily Ito; Evelyn Hidaka; and Louise Ogawa. Courtesy of Marji Kikuchi.

Caring for Others

The girls clubs performed charity work. Amino recalls, “We were all so social minded.” The Silhouettes co-hosted the Japan Relief Dance sponsored by the Jolenes with members of Charmettes, Chalelaines, Debonnaires, Estelles, Mam’selles, Philos, Serenes, Ting-a-Lings, and YuKyes. The money raised was presented to the CARE organization, an international war-relief group. The Mam’selles and other groups raised scholarship funds for girls and sent food and clothing to charity.

Nisei girls cared a lot about dress and makeup, and fashion shows became another popular way for girls clubs to raise funds. Club members donned glamorous outfits. Amino was tall and modeled. With fabric Amino selected and paid for, Kow Kaneko, a local designer, made Amino outfits to model in a fashion show that she kept after the event. Ms. Kaneko and some girls assisted the Chicago Urban League, a Negro Social Welfare Agency, to raise funds to “expand Negro employment possibilities” by participating in a fashion show. A talent competition with baton twirling, imitations of Al Jolson and Betty Hutton, as well as singing and playing musical instruments benefited the Martha Washington Home. The Silhouettes helped raise money for scholarships, cancer research, to purchase furniture for the Chicago Resettlers Committee and the American Friends Committee, and to support Chicago Nisei Athletic Association activities. Through these fundraising efforts, the Silhouettes projected a wholesome, clean, American image.

Learning to Lead

Girls clubs also offered opportunities to develop leadership skills. Indigenous advisors helped organize and guide group programs. The sister of a Silhouette member served as the group’s advisor, although she was only a year or two older than the teens she advised. “We used to have hayrides,” Amino recalls, “and our advisor would be necking away, in front of all of us, and we’d say, ‘Hey, she’s supposed to be our advisor.’” This was *mitomonai*, or embarrassing, to the Silhouettes because one of their understood practices was no public necking.

Later, some advisors became national leaders, including Lillian Kimura, the executive director of the YWCA and national president of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL).



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After High School

After Amino graduated from high school, she continued to participate in Silhouette activities. Post-high school activities included a career day, job counseling fair, and charm school classes in makeup and clothing at the Ellis Community Center. Girls clubs provided high school graduates with an opportunity to talk informally about sex.

A few girls club members married just after finishing high school, but most went to college. Preparation for the future was important. Long courtships were typical. Amino knew her husband for five years before they wed; they dated for three years while she attended business college and he finished a degree at Illinois Institute of Technology. He visited Amino in her parents' home almost every weekend, and she met him at events she attended with club sisters. She went on group dates with him where three or four of her club sisters joined three or four of his friends.



Maya Devi were part of the Midwest Buddhist Church and met at Olivet Institute in 1947. First row: E. Chikaraishi, T. Hattori, Y. Nakamura, Unknown, J. Yamamoto. Second row: M. Arao, F. Morita, Y. Furukawa, H. Izumi, S. Chikaraishi, K. Ishii, M. Yamamoto. Third row: A. Kurisu, J. Asakura, S. Harada, A. Yamamoto, Y. Ishibahi, S. Shimizu, Y. Ishibashi. Courtesy of George Katahira.

Friendship among Japanese American youth across the country blossomed when sports teams played in various cities. Amino met George Inai when the Serenes played basketball in Denver. Top row: Scottie Mizukami, Penny Ishimoto, Maggie Yokai, Penny Ishimoto. Second row: Maggie Hiro Takaki, Mary Nakaso Takaki, Mary Ann Ouye. Third row: Maggie Hatada. Fourth row: Aiko Suzuki, Aiko Suzuki. Bottom row: Ets Mizukami, Ets Mizukami, Aiko Suzuki, and Yo Ishimoto. Courtesy of Pat Amino.

From Girls to Wives

After marriage, Amino continued to play basketball and participate in other club activities. Then, she remembers, "My whole club got married in one year. Twelve of them, so we went to a lot of weddings. Then a year after that, they all had babies except me—so, baby showers." Members drifted away from girls club activities after they had children.



Silhouettes Reunion, Las Vegas 1995. Emma Kushino Horiuchi, Candi Yasui, Takayo Tsubouchi Fisher, Lucy Uyeda Yamauchi, and Pat Amino (Aiko Suzuki). Courtesy of Pat Amino.



My Ideal Dance, November 13, 1948 at the Woodlawn Boys Club. Allen Hagio croons to the new queen, Takayo Tsubouchi of the Silhouettes, for her looks, poise, personality, and talents. Her court includes Fuku Sakuma of the Philos, Marji Kikuchi of Jolene's, and Shirley Kawanaga and Dorothy Okamoto of the Debonnaires. Courtesy of Pat Amino.

Lifelong Friendships

Girls clubs officially disbanded in 1953. The Silhouettes had lasted for eight years, from when the girls were fourteen to twenty-two years old. When Amino looks back to her association with girls clubs, she appreciates the "security the Silhouettes provided in insecure times." She recalls the girls' happy times together with fondness. The Silhouettes offered social associations through which Nisei women found marriage partners in unusual, distinctive ways after the war.

Although the organizations disbanded nearly fifty years ago, many former members retain their strong emotional bonds and work at keeping their friendships alive. They keep in touch with each other even though they reside in many different states. In retirement, some former members have found time to socialize and enjoy walking, bowling, golf, and card playing together. The girls club members still hold well-attended reunions every two years.

Grateful acknowledgment is given to the following individuals with much appreciation for their help with this article. A big thanks to Pat Aiko Suzuki Amino for so generously sharing her club stories and photos; to Aya Fukuda and Helen Takiko Oda for sharing their pre- and post-war memories; to Darcie Ike the REgenerations Project Director; to Mary Doi, the REgenerations Chicago Coordinator and interviewer of Amino on March 30, 1998; to Sojin Kim for assisting in editing a previous version of this article; to Ken Mazawa, a photographer who documented Japanese American life in Chicago on film and shared his wonderful treasury of photographs; to Pat Amino, Margaret Hiratsuka, and George Katahira for lending their girls club pictures; and to Lil Nitahara Nakawatasae and Noreen Nishiyama Enkoji for identifying some people in photos. Deep gratitude is acknowledged for the institutional support received from the Japanese American National Museum, the Chicago Japanese American Historical Society, and Northeastern Illinois University. Many, many thanks to Rosemary Adams and the Chicago Historical Society for bringing this article to print.